
Unit 8: Unique responsibilities of drivers of special children

Overview

As the concluding session of the course, the focus in Unit 8 shifts to the personal qualities and attributes necessary in drivers working with children with special needs.



Unit 8 Framework

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| Core Content Outline 8.1. Unit 8 introduction 8.2. Fitness 8.3. Comportment 8.4. Emotional demands - and benefits 8.5. Unit 8 review | Objectives By the conclusion of this unit, drivers will be able to: 1. Describe the unique physical demands that can be placed on drivers transporting children in wheelchairs and safety seats. 2. Describe appropriate dress and hygiene standards when working around children with special needs. 3. Describe the unique emotional demands and benefits of working with children with special needs. |
| Suggested Time 30 minutes | Preparation 1. Review Best Practice Backgrounders regarding fitness, comportment, and character. 2. Overhead projector, screen, and transparencies in place |

UNIT 8.1
CORE CONTENT
Unit 8 introduction

**BEST PRACTICE
BACKGROUNDER**

What kind of person makes a great bus driver for children with special needs? Not everyone possesses the skills, motivation, or character to be a school bus driver for children with special needs.

The importance of attention to details, patience, and caring when transporting children in wheelchairs was discussed in Unit 6.

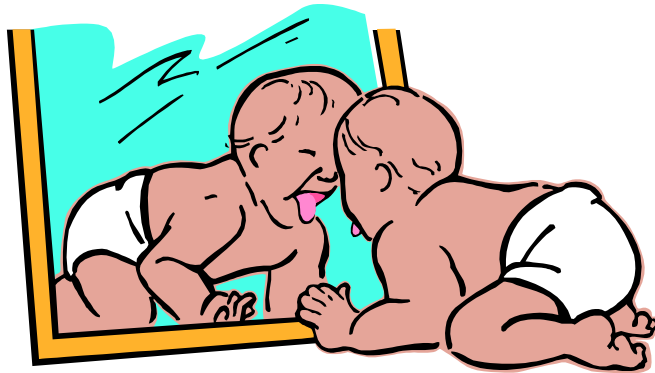
When experienced drivers are asked what personal characteristics contributed to their success in working with special children, the following qualities are most frequently listed

- “Loves children.”
- “Knack for communicating with all kinds of children.”
- “Empathy.”
- “Takes pleasure in serving others.”
- “Ability to laugh at yourself.”
- “Dedicated.”
- “Willing to learn.”
- “Proud of doing a good job.”
- “Serious about children’s safety.”
- “Doesn’t mind hard work.”
- “Flexible, adapts quickly to changes.”
- “Conscientious.”
- “I haven’t taken a sick day in 6 years. I don’t trust my kids to anyone else!”

Other qualities. Along with the character traits mentioned above, drivers for children with special

needs also need some specific attributes:

- Physical fitness.
- Appropriate standards in dress and hygiene.
- Emotional maturity.



Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *What kind of person makes a great bus driver for children with special needs?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 8-1: “Unique Responsibilities of Drivers of Special Children”*

Flipchart

- ✎ *On the flipchart, log driver ideas about specific qualities that make up a great driver.*

Workbook

- ✎ *8-1*

UNIT 8.2
CORE CONTENT
Fitness

**BEST PRACTICE
BACKGROUND**

Special physical demands.

Those who have never done it would be surprised at the physical demands that can be required of drivers and aides working with children who have special needs and conditions.

Strength and dexterity requirements for loading and securing wheelchairs. Bus drivers who have never loaded or secured wheelchairs are frequently startled to see the physical exertion that can be involved.

- Some wheelchairs are very heavy. With children in the chair, some wheelchairs can weigh in excess of 400 pounds. Maneuvering heavy wheelchairs onto lifts can be challenging. Moving a wheelchair to its securement area in the tight confines of a bus, often around other wheelchairs, can be difficult.
- Reaching around and under wheelchairs to attach securement straps often requires drivers or aides to crawl on their knees. Dexterity and strength are needed to hook wheelchairs up correctly.
- Drivers and aides should be physically capable of removing any students on their buses who can't get out on their own during an emergency evacuation. A driver with pronounced physical limitations, who cannot drag a heavy disabled child to an exit in an emergency, is not the right choice for that route.

Lifting young children. Even very young children with disabilities should be allowed as

much independence as possible. Drivers or aides shouldn't do everything for them.

- But sometimes preschoolers with disabilities need assistance



to get on or off the bus or to climb in or out of a safety seat or other type of child restraint. Children who are unsteady on their feet need support on the bus steps. Driver or aide should stand below the child to prevent a fall.

- Children who cannot safely board or exit a bus by the steps on their own may need to use a wheelchair for boarding and exiting.
- Each child is unique, and drivers should consult with a supervisor, school nurse, or occupational therapist when a child needs to be physically lifted on or off the bus every day.
- Lifting children, especially in the tight space of a school bus, can easily result in an injury to the child or the adult. If lifting is unavoidable, drivers and aides must exercise great caution and practice safe lifting techniques

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *Why do drivers transporting children in wheelchairs need to be physically fit?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 8-2: "Fitness"*

Workbook

- ✎ 8-2

BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Appropriate dress and suitable hygiene. The importance of driver professionalism has been one of the main themes of this course. It applies to the care with which drivers dress and maintain themselves.

There are several reasons that drivers of children with special



needs should pay close attention to their clothes and hygiene:

- Drivers and aides for children with disabilities routinely work in close physical proximity with their children: for instance, while loading and securing wheelchairs, placing children into safety seats, fastening seat belts, and occasionally, interacting with misbehaving children.
- Maneuvering wheelchairs on and off wheelchair lifts increases the chance of a slip or fall for the adult.
- Some children with emotional problems are especially sensitive to inappropriate or provocative dress.
- Children with medical problems can be especially sensitive or allergic to environmental conditions, including odors.

Mistakes to avoid.

- Sharp jewelry or pens in pockets, etc. – can poke children.
- Dangling necklaces or earrings – young or disturbed children may grab them.
- Long hair can be grabbed by children.
- Clothes that could be provocative to children – tank tops, short-shorts, and tight jeans should be avoided. Similarly, clothes and hats with inappropriate slogans must be avoided.
- Footwear that increases the possibility of a trip or fall. Shoes with good tread make sense for anyone working around buses and wheelchairs.
- Dangling scarves or loose clothes can be caught in wheelchair lifts or bus doors and should be avoided.
- Perfume and cologne can cause allergic reactions in some children and should be avoided while “on duty.” Even cigarette smoke on clothes can cause reactions in some children.

UNIT 8.3 CORE CONTENT *Comportment*

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *Why do drivers of children with disabilities need to pay close attention to their clothes and hygiene?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 8-3: “Comportment”*

Optional activity

- ✓ *See Activity 8.3, “What’s Wrong with this Picture?”*

Workbook

- ✎ 8-3

BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Emotionally-charged situations. At times, working with children with disabilities is no more emotionally challenging for a school bus driver than working with nondisabled children.

At other times, drivers can be suddenly plunged into emotionally-charged situations that try their composure and maturity.

- Working with medically fragile and seriously ill children whose conditions begin to worsen can be extremely sad.
- A disabled child's death can be devastating to a driver and aide who transported the child. When a tragedy occurs, school officials sometimes forget about the emotional impact on drivers and aides.
- Working with children whose mental and cognitive impairments lead to frustrations and disappointments at school or home can be sad.
- Working with children who are emotionally disturbed can be emotionally trying for the adults too. Maintaining self-control and a positive outlook towards an abusive child can be a challenge.
- Occasionally, parents will "vent" their frustrations about their child's disability, or their anger towards school administrators in general, to the driver or aide.

Special benefits of working with special children. Many drivers who have transported

children with special needs for years would never do anything else. They fall in love with "their kids." Few bus drivers get to know children the way special needs drivers do.

The bus can be a very big part of a child's life.

Many drivers or children with disabilities have established



lifelong friendships with children they transported, and their children's parents.

When asked why she'd stuck with the job for so long, one experienced special needs driver put it this way: "I think I get more from the kids I transport than I give them. Their smiles

UNIT 8.4 CORE CONTENT *Emotional demands and benefits*

are priceless. The innocence and wonder in their faces is worth a lot more than money. Believe it or not, there have been times in my life when I was going through personal problems and it was the children on my bus more than anything else that kept me going. I owe them so much."

The sense of helping a child is one of the best feelings an adult can experience.

Helping children with special needs to receive an education can be emotionally demanding – sure. But it's also a privilege.

Instructional Strategies

Discussion questions

- ✓ *What are some of the emotionally charged situations drivers of children with special needs may face?*
- ✓ *Are there any emotional benefits to transporting children with special needs?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 8-4: "Emotional Demands - and Benefits"*

Workbook

- ✎ 8-4

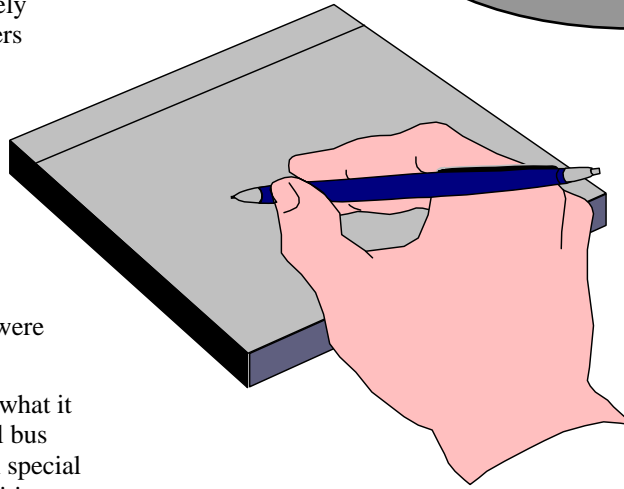
BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

This is the last unit of the course and its focus is deliberately brought back to the drivers themselves.

As the last unit, issues that arose previously in class may re-emerge. Trainers should make sure that questions drivers wanted answered at the very beginning of the course were addressed.

A realistic discussion of what it takes to be a great school bus driver with children with special needs is a fitting and positive summary of the entire course.

The Final Course Review can immediately follow this unit, or can be scheduled for a separate session.



UNIT 8.5 CORE CONTENT *Unit 8 review*

Instructional Strategies

Review questions

- ✓ *What unique physical demands can be placed on drivers transporting children in wheelchairs and safety seats?*
- ✓ *What are appropriate dress and hygiene standards when working around children with special needs?*
- ✓ *What are the unique emotional demands and benefits of working with children with special needs?*

Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 8-5: "Unit 8 Review"*

Workbook

- ✎ 8.5